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The Art Gallery

SOME MASTERPIECES OF ART.

III.



THE works of sculpture in the Vatican, few pieces are more curious than the statue of Julia Sœmias, preserved in the Museo Pio-Clementino. As was not uncommon with the Roman ladies of rank, Julia caused herself to be represented by the artist with the attributes of Venus. The drapery falling from the hips stamps the figure at once as a masquerade of the Idalian goddess, and the attribute of an ointment-box held in the hand suggests to the mind that favorite antique subject "The Toilet of Venus," which, when fully carried out by



JULIA SÆMIAS.

the proper accessory figures, represents the divinity arrayed by the three Charities and by Persuasion. It is only by courtesy that this figure can be admitted among a series of classical masterpieces. It is Roman art of the third century, and though intended as a piece of imperial flattery, its flattery is not very skillful. Its historical allusiveness is, however, most curious. It refers to that strange antique Sorosis, that congress of taste made up of a senate of ladies, with Julia at its head, which prescribed all the modes and fashions to be observed throughout the Roman Empire, and arbitrated the disputes and affairs of the matrons. This senate of fair Amazons was appointed by the frivolous boy-emperor Heliogabalus, the son of Julia. The arrangement of the statue bears direct reference to this government of fashions, for besides it being a travesty of the goddess of the toilet at her bath, it has a very singular attribute. The hair is removable. The statues of Roman empresses as goddesses, of which a number are seen together in the Naples Museum, are not at all particular to give a Greek aspect to the coiffure, but represent the Olympians under the various fashionable extravagances of the Roman barber. The effigy of Julia, however, goes further than that, and, not content with presenting a single arrangement of tasteless Roman hair-dressing, provides for the changing of the hair from time to time; and we may suppose this very figure exposed in some public place to the view of Roman fashion, with its hair new-dressed from season to season; this would be an edict for the rise or fall of wigs and chignons all over the Empire, pro-

mulgated both with the authority of the leading modiste and the sacred terrors of a divine decree. When the army sedition arose which was to cost Heliogabalus his life, this Roman mother was found shielding her son in her embrace in a ditch of the camp, and he was beheaded in her arms. The period was one of great extravagance in dress, Heliogabalus being the first Roman to wear a silk robe; and the use of hair-dye and wigs was very common. Ovid observes that "the different ways of dressing the hair in Rome were equal in number to the acorns of a many branched oak, to the bees of Hybla, to the wild beasts in the Alps, every new day adding to the number." The Roman ladies when married were distinguished by the high frontlet of curls, as solid as a sponge, which we see over the foreheads of so many portrait busts. Julia Donna's falling bandeaux of thick waved hair, descending over the ears as low as the chin, are well known on the coins and gems. The color was at first changed to orange by means of a caustic soap; but during the German wars the flaxen hair of barbarian women had an enormous market for wigs. A bust with movable hair ascribed to Lucilla (a younger contemporary of Julia) is to be seen in the Royal collection of antiques at Berlin.

The "Fighting Gladiator," so called, everybody knows is not a gladiator at all. The heroic nudity of the figure shows it to have been a work of ideal character, probably dedicated to a legendary celebrity. Thiersch thinks it may be Achilles contending with Penthesila the Amazon. Differing from other antiques, which are complete in themselves, this figure needs many accessories to explain its action. We must imagine an opponent on horseback, to which the intense upward gaze of the hero is directed; and fancy must supply too the sword in the right hand, and the shield, of which only the strap remains around the left arm. This splendid piece of work is signed "Agasias, son of Dositheus the Ephesian," and it is probable that it is not the copy of any other masterpiece, but an original conception. It is the only antique athlete represented in what moderns would grant to be "fighting condition." Its lean, sinewy tension is admirably expressive. The period of its sculptor may probably have been about 400 B. C. It was found buried in the sea-coast sands at Antium, near the palace of the Roman emperors, on the spot where, a century earlier, the Apollo Belvidere was found. A whole family of Ephesian artists seems to be indicated in the name of Agasias, so common on antiques—a family finally extinct, perhaps, in Roman subjugation, with that Agasias of Delos who lived a hundred years before our era. The "Fighting Gladiator" became the property of the Borghese family. Napoleon bought in 1808 the collection of antiquities in the Borghese villa, 255 in number. The "Gladiator" is now one of the most highly valued treasures of the Louvre. In view of the obvious fact that this combatant is looking upward to an opponent placed higher, there is something singularly infelicitous in the use of the figure made by the artist Cole, who represents it of colossal size in his "Course of Empire," perched upon a pedestal above a city, and still directing its upward gaze with perseverance combined with a wonderful lack of purpose.

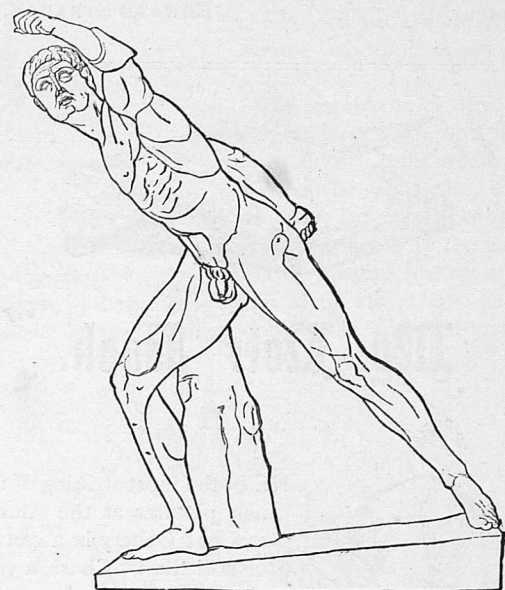
SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS was once commissioned by one of the royal princes to paint a portrait of Haydn, the celebrated composer. Haydn went to the residence of the painter and gave him a sitting, but soon grew tired. Sir Joshua would not paint a man of such genius with a stupid countenance, and adjourned the sitting. The same weariness and want of expression occurring at the next attempt, Sir Joshua communicated the circumstance to the commissioning prince, who contrived a stratagem. He sent to the painter's house a pretty German girl in the service of the Queen. Haydn took his seat for

the third time, and as soon as the conversation began to flag a curtain rose, and the fair German addressed him in his native tongue with a compliment. Haydn, delighted, overwhelmed the enchantress with questions; his countenance recovered its animation, and Sir Joshua rapidly and successfully seized its traits.

"DAPHNIS AND CHLOE."

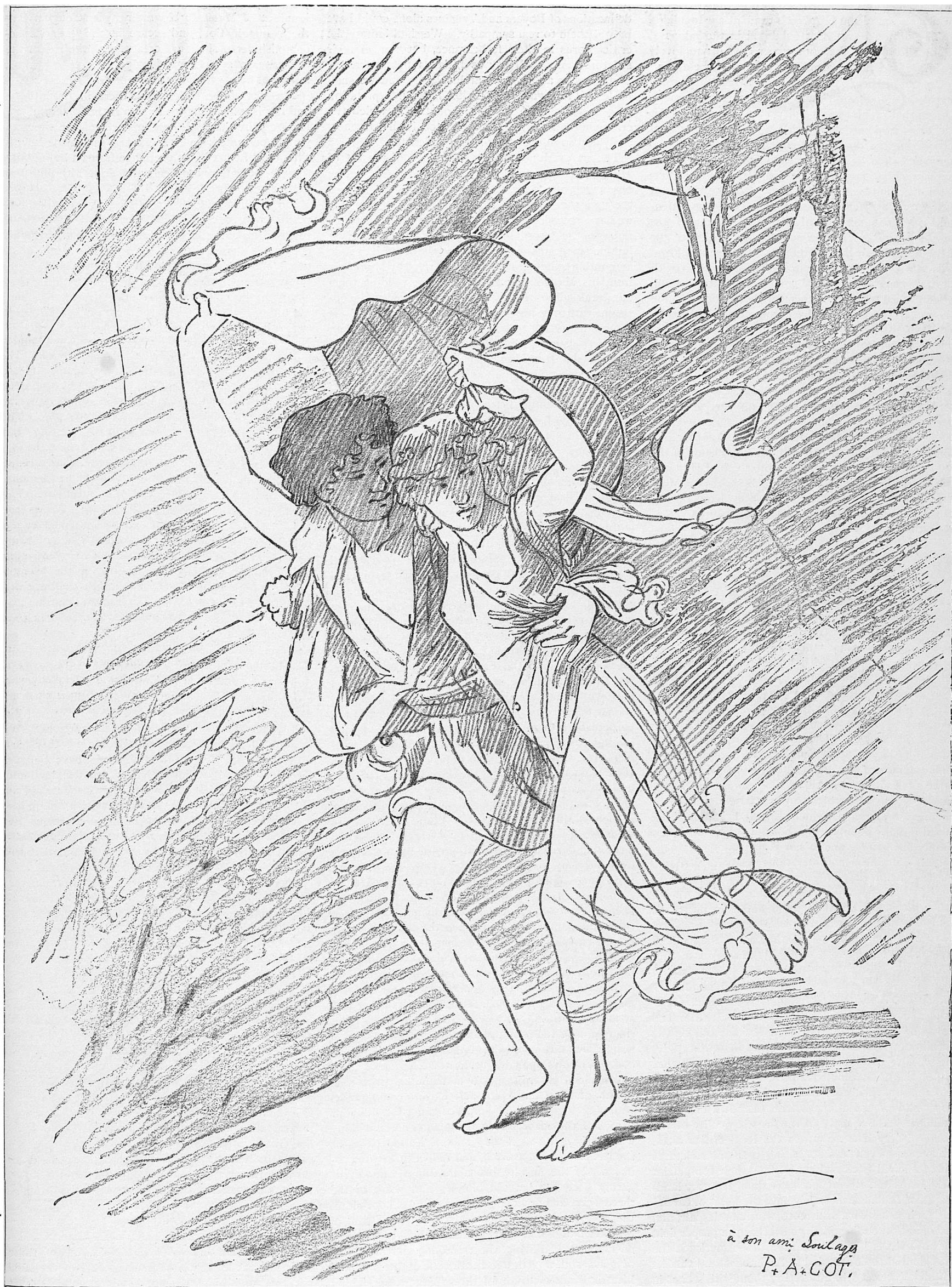
OUR readers are doubtless familiar with P. A. Cot's beautiful picture entitled "Spring"—"Le Printemps"—representing a charming youth and maiden swinging together in genuine idyllic fashion. The same painter is finishing now for the Salon of 1880 a companion-picture, a sketch of which by the artist himself is reproduced in fac-simile on the opposite page of this number of THE ART AMATEUR. The costumes are nearly the same as in the "Spring," but the attitudes are by no means alike, for here the two youthful figures are flying precipitately from a rising storm. The picture has a mountainous background, said to resemble a view at Cot's birthplace. The storm is just breaking, the lightning furrows the clouds, and the two young fugitives, pursued by the hurricane, are hastening to a grotto. The girl turns away from the lightning in terror, but her companion smiles at her fears and hurries her to the friendly shelter. We are informed that the title the work will bear is "Daphnis and Chloe," though it is quite clear that "Autumn"—"L'Automne"—would be a felicitous name for it.

The painter of this picture, Pierre Auguste Cot, was born at Bédarieux, a small town in the south of France. He began his art studies at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Toulouse, and continued them at Paris towards the year 1860, when he was a little more than twenty years of age. It was not long before he obtained a leading rank in the École des Beaux Arts of Paris, and received successively all the medals. He had also an excellent chance of obtaining the "prize of Rome," when, by a modification of the rules concerning the age of competitors, he was excluded. For many years he studied under the direction of Cognet, and worked with his old master upon the decorations of the Salle des Fêtes at the



"THE FIGHTING GLADIATOR."

Hôtel de Ville, unhappily destroyed by the incendiaries of the Commune. His ability as a designer and his facility of execution procured him entrance to the studio of Bouguereau, where he remained for years. It was through the medium of this new master that he formed the acquaintance of the Duret family, of which he soon became a member by marrying the eldest daughter, Juliette, the father of his



COT'S "DAPHNIS AND CHLOE."

SKETCH BY THE ARTIST OF HIS PICTURE FOR THE SALON OF 1880

[Contributed to *The Art Amateur* by Dr. C. C. Soulages, of New York.]

wife being the celebrated sculptor of the Caryatides which surround the Emperor's tomb at the Invalides.

The first works of Cot exhibited in the salons at Paris showed the charm of clever design and lovely painting. "Une Baigneuse," "La Nympe Salmacis," "Un Prométhée," together with a ravishing study entitled "Meditation" and some portraits, among others that of his young and pretty wife, secured for the artist two medals, which placed him "hors concours" for the annual recompenses, precisely at the moment when he was about to obtain his greatest success with "Spring," of which Mr. Wolfe of New York has long been the possessor. To the Universal Exposition at Vienna he sent the "Danseuse Orientale" and the portrait of his wife. A medal was awarded him by Austria, and the decoration of the Legion of Honor by the French Government. From this moment the artist occupied himself entirely with portraits, specially those of women. Beautiful young blondes vied with each other for the honor of seeing their charms reproduced by Cot, and for the Universal Exposition of 1878 the Marshal McMahon requested him to paint the portrait of the French President's wife, which, with three others by the same artist, figured at the Champ de Mars.

During the last few years, almost exclusively consecrated to the "jolies blondes," no new work has been presented to the public, though Cot desired long ago to make a pendant to "Spring." Another picture which has for years past hung unfinished in the studio of Cot represents Queen Elizabeth of Hungary caring for the invalids in a hall of her palace. More than twenty figures of life size are depicted on the canvas, but the painter has never found time to complete the work.

ART COLLECTION OF THE LENOX LIBRARY.

THE Art Gallery appertaining to this fine library was again opened to the public, after the summer recess, early in November. It is not a gallery made conventional by the arbitrary standard of curators and superintendents; the individuality of a self-responsible collector, with hobbies of his own and affections and caprices of his own, is stamped all over it, and gives it an interesting eccentricity.

It is not every year that an established resort can reopen with such a sensation as was provided for the Lenox this season. The "Milton" of Munkácsy is an exhibition of itself. Subject, execution, the fame and romance of the artist, all told in its favor; the pride of securing to America a canvas for which Europe competed, which Austria falsely boasted of having appropriated, which England claimed the initial right of popularizing through the burin, which France claimed for one of her most cunning etching-needles—all these considerations made a veritable success of notoriety for the picture. The treatment by the American critics was singular. When American critics see a bit of pictorial ambition by Blashfield or Bridgman, a bit of pictorial self-glorification by Gérôme or Alma-Tadema, they are in the habit of laying their fingers sadly alongside of their noses and telling the painter that historical research is not art; that the energy he exerts in studying out minute accuracies of costume and manners is so much taken from the proper aim and end of his craft. The "Milton" arrived, and they fastened in a body on the question of its historical accuracy or inaccuracy, giving themselves immense pains to decide whether Milton might possibly have possessed a Flanders jug and tapestry furniture, and whether Milton's daughters could or could not write. Our own criticisms shall be directed more to the artistic quality of the masterpiece. The strictures the local critics made are perhaps even less surprising than the strictures they refrained from making. When their compatriot Bridgmans and Blashfields show them Brittany landscapes or Italian scenes, they have the habit of caressing their noses with still more obstinate despair, and instructing the misguided youth that the proper field for an artist is his own country; that America is the providential topic awarded to Americans, and that he will never succeed in interesting them with scenes in foreign countries; yet in the case of the Hungarian they pointedly abstained from reviling him for his choice of an English scene; they renounced the triumph of telling him that they could only have been interested in his views of Hungarian politics, so

profoundly affecting to the outer world, and that his delineations of Boyers and Tziganes alone could have moved them to real sympathy. We shall imitate the critic-chorus in their forbearance, but not in their strictures; we shall say as little as possible about Munkácsy as an accurate archæologist, and we shall profess all the sympathy possible in his interpretation of a scene outside his own country, in which the critic-chorus likewise has interested itself so generously and so in defiance of its own lessons.

The art of Munkácsy is an outcome of the art of Munich, the art of Piloty. Of all the influences he has undergone, none remains so obvious as that of the atelier in Bavaria. Now this is a school of which we have recorded our distrust. The thick unctuous impasto, the forced light and shade, the emphasized luminousness amounting to glitter, the breadth of style amounting to impressionism, are derived by Munkácsy from his Munich education. And in yielding them our frank admiration, we are forced to seem inconsistent with our previous teachings. Very well! It is more important to be consistent with a truth than to be consistent with a dogma; and we are happy to acknowledge that Munichism, and Pilotism, and impressionism, understood as Munkácsy understands them, are one of the manifestations of truth. No painter understands better than he the positiveness and solidity of an object in floating light, the self-assertion of a form in all the realistic pride of cubic dimensions. He knows how to dissimulate the martinet exactness of minor forms in the broad, both of palpitating and generalizing light. The academic school of France, trained to search for the outline, to refine upon outline within outline, and contour within contour, becomes almost inevitably an amateur of form alone, and thus grows unconsciously a little dry and hard. Since the grand educational stand taken by David, painting has been training to love what is sculptural in nature rather than what is pictorial, and we find ourselves praising qualities which, to earn their full meed of appropriate eulogy, had been better expressed in stone than on canvas. The advent among them of a Munkácsy is, in fact, a precious lesson to the French. At the same time, the French influence has reacted very favorably on his own talent. The impressionism of a man constantly held to his facts by the influence in the air, perpetually brought up to his accuracy of line by the example of the Detailles, the Fortunys, the Meissonniers, the Lefebvres, is rich, enjoyable, and fruitful. It is trained. Only after he has become an able draughtsman is a painter authorized to give us his floating impressions. The generalized impressions of a Michael Munkácsy, of a Jean François Millet, are valuable, because they retain a conscientiousness and a training derived from hard hours spent in worrying over anatomy and the antique. They are different from the vague poetic impressions, not fixed by academies, of a Couture or a William Hunt. Untrained impressions are an impertinence. But when the training has been had, when the artist is firmly horsed on his science and his facts, how delicious is the moment when he casts the bridle loose, and, viewing nature with the half closed eye of imagination, gives us his record in its generalization, his discernment in its breadth! Such is the triumph of Munkácsy in the "Milton." The caressing light plays upon the figures of the poet and his three daughters, upon the faded furniture and dark dingy walls, as a composer plays upon his orchestra. No mere academician can get this sort of a triumph. It is one breath of truth and color and harmony and poesy, wrapping together in an imperial unity the different details of the scene. It is one gush of aerial melody which passes through the greenish leaded panes at the left of the composition, and reduces to a sumptuous whole the austere black Puritan statue of the sitting poet, the languid blondes and grays of the three weary and anxious girls, the crimson floor-cloth, the cherry-colored dinner-chairs, the faded rose of Milton's fauteuil, the pert and saucy blue of the grès-de-Flanders claret-jug, the trembling, darting lights of glass and waxed woodwork, the dulness of the historic window-curtain of threadbare green. Think how a Gérôme would have carved such a group, how he would have dissected the throat and knuckles of the melancholy Lear, how he would have dwelt on cheek-bones and finger-nails, how he would have anatomized Regan and desiccated Goneril, while the

present painter, ignorant of English Protestantism, ignorant of Masson's biography, yet strong in synthetic imagination, and secure in the prentice accomplishments of his art, creates with the rod of the enchanter a symphony of palpitating colors and a mirror of heart-subduing and mournful drama.

The rest of the collection is there in its entirety, and furnishes various documents in the history of art. Not only are the noble dead masters of the times of yore represented, but others are represented with whom Mr. Lenox in his green age forms a living link, though for us they are dead and done with like the old masters.

There is a large group of orders given to Leslie—perfunctory scenes of Bible history, chalky in method, orientalisms of the Regency, proofs how an American cockney is a more thorough cockney than an English one. There is a splendid, lurid Turner in glorious preservation. Leslie's life, another link with the past and with the collector's present, gives us the clue: "It fell to my lot to select the first of Turner's pictures that went to America. Mr. James Lenox, of New York, who knew his works only from engravings, wished very much to possess one, and wrote to me to that effect. I replied that his rooms were full of unsold works, and I had no doubt he would part with one. Mr. Lenox expressed his willingness to give 500*l.*, and left the choice to me. I called on Turner, and asked if he would let a picture go to America. 'No; they won't come up to the scratch.' I knew what he meant, for another American had offered him a low price for the 'Téméraire.' I told him a friend of mine would give 500*l.* for anything he would part with. His countenance brightened, and he said at once: 'He may have that, or that, or that,' pointing to three not small pictures. I chose a sunset view of 'Staffa,' which I had admired more than most of his works when it was first exhibited. It was in an old frame, but Turner would have a very handsome new one made for it." The very handsome encadrement, a specimen of Turner's taste, the choice of Leslie, when paintings by Turner were far more accessible than now, and one of the dozen recorded speeches of Turner, are perpetuated in this transaction. The "Staffa" is a triumph of cloudy Turnerian glory, more realistic than the "Slave-ship" in Boston, more poetical than the Welsh scene owned by the painter Moran. "Mr. Lenox soon after came to London," pursues Leslie, "and bought another picture of Turner's at a sale, and would have bought the 'Téméraire,' but Turner had then determined not to sell it." This second purchase was the "English Ship of War Stranded on the French Coast," obtained at Christie's in 1850, one of Turner's efforts to get luminousness without chiaroscuro—brightness obtained without tricks of black contrast, and perhaps as successfully as is possible with that disadvantage.

There are three fine Sir Joshuas. One of them, the "Mrs. Billington Surrounded by Angels," a masterpiece, and the largest canvas in the gallery. The dappled English sky in this picture is in perfect preservation, as sweet and transparent a bit of azure flecked with warm white as is ever furnished by your Ziemss and Français, and itself a lesson in landscape-painting. The crystal transparency of this canvas sky suggests porcelain-painting. The "Writing-boy" alongside shows Reynolds' pregnant study of Murillo in his "Beggar-boy" painting mood, and the "Kitty Fisher," with all the color "restored" out of it, reveals him in his occasional Vandyke-like elegance of pose and drawing, albeit applied to a worthless English lorette. There are a good Constable, a fair (landscape) Gainsborough, a capital Morland, several unimportant yet piquant Wilkies, and some fine Gilbert Stuarts.

The individuality of the collector is apparent all through the arrangement of the gallery, and removes it as far as possible from the etiquette of the ordinary museum. Between the Morland and the group of Wilkies hangs a chromo-lithograph. A common engraving, not even a proof, glares close beside the incomparable Turners. When the reasons of these selections are looked into, your interest in the kind collector and his life-history only increases. Two painted copies of "Paul Potter's Bull" are found among the unreplaceable originals. You are made at home among the hobbies of an aged and genial eccentric, not driven by a beadle through a perspective of ennui and etiquette. EDWARD STRAHAN.